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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, INR/NESA; NSC FOR E. MILLARD

LONDON FOR POL/RIEDEL

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [EAID](#) [CE](#) [NO](#) [JA](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: Tigers issue hard-edged letter demanding interim structure in north/east

Refs: (A) Colombo-SA/INS 05/21/03 unclass e-mail

- (B) Colombo 838, and previous

(U) Classified by Lewis Amselem, Deputy Chief of Mission. Reasons: 1.5 (b,d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: The Tamil Tigers have sent the Norwegian facilitators a tough letter demanding the setting up of an "interim administrative structure" in the north/east, which the group would control. The Tigers say they might restart peace talks and come to the Tokyo conference if the government reacts positively to their proposal. With contacts telling us the group is in an increasingly hard-line mode, the sudden recrudescence of the interim structure idea raises real questions regarding the Tigers' commitment to the process. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) TOUGH TIGER LETTER: Late May 21, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) sent the Norwegian government facilitators a tough letter demanding the setting up of an interim structure in the north and east. (Note: The text of the letter was posted on the pro-LTTE website "TamilNet" and has been sent to SA/INS in Ref A.) In the long, complicated, and somewhat convoluted letter, which was addressed to Deputy Foreign Minister Vidar Helgesen, LTTE spokesman Anton Balasingham makes clear that the Tigers believe that previous agreements on structures/modalities of funneling humanitarian/development assistance to the north and east are not working. On this point, Balasingham states flatly:

"Unfortunately, SIHRN (see note below) failed to function effectively and no progress has been made toward alleviating the hardships and suffering of the displaced population...This lack of performance and the failure to produce tangible results on urgent humanitarian issues has eroded all confidence of the Tamil people in SIHRN."

(Note: "SIHRN" stands for Sub-Committee on Immediate Humanitarian and Rehabilitation Needs for the North and East, which was formed earlier this year as a joint GSL-LTTE committee working on assistance issues. Since the committee was set up, the Tigers have basically argued that they wanted watertight acknowledgement of their right to control funds allotted for the north/east. End Note.)

3. (U) In light of this characterization of SIHRN's performance and rejecting recent GSL proposals to reform assistance implementation, Balasingham goes on to state that the LTTE has no choice but to return to its long-standing demand that an "interim administrative structure" be set up for the north and east. (Note: The letter is not clear, but the LTTE seems to be envisaging that the interim structure would mainly focus on economic matters, but would also have a dominant political role.) In making this demand, Balasingham notes that during the December 2001 national election campaign the governing United National Party (UNP) advocated the setting up of an interim structure to govern the north and east. Although the idea of forming such a body was left off the peace process' agenda up to now, Balasingham says the LTTE believes it is now time to revive it because the proposal is the only way forward given the failure of SIHRN and given that "a permanent political settlement is not feasible in the immediate future." While couching his public comments carefully, Balasingham also leaves little doubt that the LTTE should control this interim structure. He notes, for example, that the 1987 Indo-Sri Lankan accord provided the "LTTE a dominant participatory role" in a proposed interim council to govern the north/east. (Note: Aside from this one mention of the Indo-Sri Lankan accord, the letter is otherwise vague on potential constitutional implications.)

14. (U) Balasingham also addresses the issue of the peace talks, which the Tigers recently pulled out of, and the upcoming donors conference in Tokyo, which the Tigers have said they will not attend. He indicates that a positive response to the LTTE's demands might lead the LTTE to change its mind on these matters, stating:

"A positive and constructive response from the prime minister setting out his ideas and proposals in clear and concrete terms will certainly help our leadership to take a crucial decision on the resumption of peace talks and participation at the donor conference in Japan."

15. (C) TAMIL CONTACTS ON LTTE MINDSET: The LTTE letter came out too late on May 21 for contacts to provide us a considered response. In discussions with poloffs held early May 21, however, Tamil political contacts who had met with the LTTE on May 20, indicated that the group was increasingly in a hard-line, uncompromising mode. Echoing the comments of other Tamil National Alliance (TNA) figures, Suresh Premachandran, told us that political chief S.P. Thamilselvam, who led the Tiger side at the meeting, made clear that the LTTE was fed up with the GSL. The LTTE felt that the government -- while basically well intentioned -- was not strong and could not carry through on its plans because it was too afraid of Sinhalese chauvinists. In making these comments, Premachandran said Thamilselvam asserted in very strong terms that the Sinhalese south could not be trusted because it had broken agreements with Tamils so many times in the past. (Note: In a May 19 meeting, Deputy Foreign Minister Helgesen told us that LTTE leaders had made this same point in vivid terms during recent interactions with the Norwegians.) At this point, Premachandran added, the LTTE wanted written, ironclad assurances from the GSL on the way forward, or they would continue to stall the process.

16. (C) Despite their hardline positioning, Premachandran still thought that the Tigers "were committed to the peace process and would listen to reason." He allowed that he was not sure the government could meet in short order all of the LTTE's demands and thus ensure the group's participation in the Tokyo conference. He thought, however, that the LTTE had not totally discounted the possibility of participating in Tokyo.

17. (U) (((Note: Before Balasingham's letter was issued, we had heard that the LTTE's S.P. Thamilselvam was planning to hold a press conference on May 22 in the LTTE-controlled town of Kilinochchi in northern Sri Lanka. This press conference had been originally slated to take place on May 21, but had been postponed. In light of Balasingham's letter, which quite clearly enunciates LTTE thinking at this point, it is not clear whether the May 22 press conference is still on and what it might add if it is. End Note.)))

18. (C) COMMENT: While respectful in tone, the LTTE letter is hard-edged and clearly to be taken very seriously. Balasingham, for example, at several points in the letter underscores that he is transmitting the views of V. Prabhakaran, the LTTE's supreme leader. The sudden recrudescence of the interim structure idea, which had basically dropped from sight for months, raises real questions re the Tigers' commitment to the process. The group almost certainly knows that the issue is a very tricky one for the government and would -- under normal circumstances -- take months to negotiate. That said, the Tigers are pressing the government for a response right now. This degree of impatience does not appear to bode well for LTTE agreement to resume the peace talks and reconsider its decision not to participate in Tokyo. END COMMENT.

19. (U) Minimize considered.

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